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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001563

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NLD ISSUES ULTIMATUM TO THAN SHWE

REF: A. RANGOON 1530 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). RANGOON 1149 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Excerpts from a December 2nd letter from the NLD to Senior General Than Shwe indicate a new effort to engage the SPDC and prompt a bilateral dialogue. The letter is purportedly the "soft" approach, which, if ignored, will be followed up by more "confrontational methods." Though the Committee to Represent the People's Parliament (controlled by the NLD but also representing ethnic political parties) has endorsed this approach, we have our doubts that if push comes to shove the Committee's minority group of non-NLD ethnic members will take personal risks without some promise of a seat at the negotiating table should the regime agree to talk. End summary.

NLD Issues Ultimatum

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 9th, the NLD released a statement including a portion of a letter dated December 2nd from the NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) to SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe. The NLD has not made available the rest of the clearly lengthy correspondence. The portion released calls for a genuine and open dialogue "clear of grudges" and based on "mutual respect," "understanding," and "cooperation" to commence between the SPDC and the NLD. It does not call for tripartite discussions, but notes that unity of all ethnic parties and groups is essential for "a strong and everlasting nation." Dialogue, the letter states, is the only way to ensure a "strong and stable Union" into the future. It reiterates the importance the NLD places on national reconciliation and national unity and seeks common ground with Than Shwe by quoting statements he made in a mid-November speech that stress the importance of "national unity" as the foundation of democracy.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The statement notes that the Committee to Represent the People's Parliament (CRPP, formed by the NLD in 1998 to represent 14 ethnic and non-ethnic political parties), endorses the contents of the letter and calls for a dialogue to commence before the Burmese Independence Day holiday on January 4th. There are no consequences spelled out if this deadline is ignored or missed.

CRPP's Warning Shot?

[1](#)4. (C) According to a reliable CRPP source, the letter to Than Shwe is the brainchild of the NLD-dominated CRPP, which met on November 18th and again on the 29th to work on the draft. According to the source, the CRPP decided to try first offering an olive branch to Than Shwe, convincing him that the two sides were after the same objective and thus good-faith negotiations should occur. The source told us that the CRPP agreed that if this soft approach fails "more confrontational" methods would be used to break the political deadlock. The source refused to hint at what these methods might be. One proposal suggested in late August by some of the more impatient NLD regional leaders was to convene a shadow "People's Parliament" (ref B). However, this provocative act still seems an unlikely move with NLD leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo under house arrest.

Comment: A Risky Strategy

[1](#)5. (C) The CRPP runs some risks by issuing an ultimatum promising a "confrontational approach" should it be ignored. Internal CRPP politics and discussions are not clear, but we have doubts that the Committee's minority group of non-NLD ethnic members would agree wholeheartedly to take personal risks by actively confronting the SPDC without some guarantee of a seat at the negotiating table should the regime agree to talk. We would be surprised if the SPDC responds favorably to this initial soft-line. If the deadline passes, and the NLD CEC decides to push for implementation of more aggressive measures, unity of the CRPP could come under strain. End comment.

MARTINEZ